

The College Experience (An Original Album)

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Grant Armstrong

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Laurie Lindberg

Ball State University

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Abstract

Music has always been a way for people to express feelings and experiences. College is a major part of many people's lives, and everyone has a different experience. There are many situations, however, that a lot of college students experience. I created an album titled "The College Experience," consisting of three songs which I feel highlight some of the struggles and landmarks of college. The songs are "Undeclared," "Leftovers," and "What Have You Learned?" Each one describes a college student through a different experience in college.

Acknowledgments

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Process Analysis

I first became interested in music when I was in middle school. The first instrument I learned to play was the drums. I took lessons for a few years and even played in my church's worship band for a while. Around this time, I began to play around on the piano, and I liked listening to songs and then figuring out how to play them. I even started writing original songs. The first song I ever wrote was for my brother when he went off to college. It was titled "College Jerk," and it was basically a song telling him not to turn into a jerk in college and forget about us. He thought it was really funny, which inspired me to continue to try to bring people laughter through songs.

Soon after, my parents got me a ukulele for Christmas. They knew I enjoyed writing songs on the piano, and at the time, I really liked the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, so they thought it would be a great gift. In my opinion, the ukulele is the perfect instrument for writing comedic music. It has a very lighthearted feel and sound to it and doesn't overpower the lyrics. This is where my songwriting really achieved its full potential. Since then, I have written over a dozen songs, some short and requiring little effort and some more polished and in-depth. All but two of them so far have been humorous, and many of them are explicit, which provided a challenge for this project as I wanted to make sure this album was suitable for any listener.

I decided to write an album for my honors thesis because I think music speaks more about who I am than a research paper would. Being both an actuary and someone who enjoys being creative and writing songs tells a lot about my personality. More importantly, in my opinion, there is no better way to express emotions than through music. For these reasons, I

wrote an album consisting of three songs all about college and different struggles or experiences of college. I call it *The College Experience*.

The first song in my album is titled "Undeclared." It details the difficult decision incoming Freshmen have to make when coming to college: choosing a major. It's such a huge turning point in life, and often times, someone's entire future depends on this important choice. Many people get jobs outside of their field of study, but choosing a major is still a significant fork in the road of life. I personally wrestled with this decision upon coming to college, and I have many friends who didn't declare a major during the first year and even switched their major three or four times before graduating. "Undeclared" seemed fitting to be the first song of the album since it's something every college student has to consider as a freshman (except the lucky ones who have always somehow known what they wanted to do with their lives).

The song begins with the singer filling out a college application. He (or she) comes across the part that asks him to choose a major and has no idea what to write down. He checks the box marked "undecided," but then begins to stress and worry about figuring out what he wants to do with his life. After the line, "But it gotcha thinkin' like," it shifts to first person narration, as we are listening to questions that the undecided college student would ask. Towards the end, he sits down and flips through *The Big Book of College Careers*. Since we are listening to his thoughts as he reads it, he rattles off different career options alphabetically. He ends with the open question, "What should I be?" I decided to leave the ending to this song open and unresolved for a reason. Many incoming college freshmen find it nearly impossible to

know what career will be their best fit. Even those who choose a major right away may struggle later on to answer the question of what they actually want to be doing after college.

This was a very interesting song to write, and definitely the most challenging one I have ever composed. The main difficulty was the alphabet verse. Finding different careers that rhymed *and* followed alphabetical order was a very difficult challenge. This portion of the song actually cuts off after "Sea Sailor." Once I reached the "v," "w," "x," and "z," I was unable to write lyrics that made sense, sounded good, and followed the rhythm of the song. This is why I made the protagonist become frustrated and overwhelmed enough to stop reading through the different career options. Another interesting note is in the line that says, "Horse racin', immigration, Kevin Bacon Impersonation?" This line skips the letter "j." Amusingly enough, I didn't actually notice this until I had completed the song. I really like that line especially; therefore, I decided to leave this little oversight so as not to interrupt the flow of the music.

Undeclared

Verse: Em Am7 G Bm

Chorus: Em Am7 G D

Verse 1:

You're filling out the college application.

Doing it for real, using pen, no erasing.

You're gonna be the type of kid your parents have been raising.

But then you see the phrase that makes your heart start racing.

"Major field of study"

Whatcha gonna be, whatcha gonna do, whatcha

Gonna dedicate four years of school to?

What kinda job is gonna make you the best you?

Check the little undecided box to the rescue.

But it gotcha thinkin like...

What should I be?

And what do I wanna do?
What should I be?
What do I wanna do?

Should I be doing something hard that's gonna make me lots of money?
Or doing something cool that's gonna get me lots of honeys?
People say that I should make a job out of a hobby,
But I don't think I'd ever be as fast as Ricky Bobby.

I drive fast, but finish last, so I don't think I would make it.
Should I pick something I'm good at even though I fuckin hate it?
It's the paradox of choice, I've got analysis paralysis,
But I've gotta make a choice because the hourglass is downing fast.
I'm drowning in the sand, I'm gonna die by my own hand.
Should I just say screw it all and go join a shitty boy band?

Chorus 2:

What should I be?
What do I wanna do?
What should I be?
What do I wanna do?

Verse 2:

So then I sat down and I drank a couple beers,
And I leafed through the Big Book of College Careers, be an
Accountant or an analyst?
Assistant Anthropologist?
Botanist? Biologist?
Cabby? Cardiologist?

Dietician, electrician, fire fighter, Geophysics,
Horse racin, immigration, Kevin Bacon impersonation?
Lion tamer, meat inspector, nanny or object collector?
Poll taker, quilt maker, retailer? Sea sailor?

Now I'm overwhelmed and a little upset
Cause I'm about to reach the end of the alphabet.
There's a thousand different options out there for me,
So what do I wanna do? And what should I be?

The second song of the album is called "Leftovers." This song is about a college student sharing an apartment with friends and needing to scrounge for his meals. He sees an old,

moldy, disgusting taco lying underneath the fridge and contemplates whether or not to eat it. Eventually he decides to eat it and (not surprisingly) it immediately causes horrible stomach pain and digestive problems. He then sprints into the bathroom, as he's lying on the floor after his "issue," he sees a half-eaten burger behind the toilet. He then contemplates eating *that* as the song ends.

This idea came to me one day during my junior year when I walked into the kitchen to get something to eat. I opened the fridge and saw mayonnaise and cheese. I had been surviving on take-out and whatever I could find around the house due to laziness and not wanting to spend money at the grocery store. That was when the idea came to me to exaggerate the situation in a song.

"Leftovers" fits into the college experience because many college students identify with this struggle. The typical college student is often stereotyped as being broke and not having time or energy to make good meals. This is where the joke comes from that all college students ever eat is Ramen Noodles. On more than one occasion, I have eaten leftovers that were starting to go bad or food that was a little too far past its expiration date.

The process of writing this song went fairly smoothly. Interestingly, there turned out to be no actual rhyming in any of the verses. This was new for me, as I have never simply used vocal sounds to make a song rhyme. While it did make the writing of the lyrics much easier, I did not make this choice out of laziness. I thought it would be interesting to change the dynamic of the song in this way and challenging to do something I've never done before. The melody of the chorus was actually inspired by the style of orchestral music, specifically the song

"O Fortuna" by Carmina Burana. I wanted to express the intensity and severity of the decision to be made and play up the act of running to the bathroom.

Leftovers

Verse: Am F Dm E7

Chorus: Am F Dm C/E7

Verse:

Look, look over there. Under the
Fridge, ah-ooh-ooo.
Is it an illusion,
Or is it true?

Who would leave that there? Gathering
Dust, ah-ahh-ohhh.
A perfectly perfect, half-eaten
Taco, taco.

Chorus 1:

Should I eat it?
Should I do it?
Should I eat that
Taco?

Kinda dirty,
Kinda moldy,
But I'm hungry for
Tacos

Verse 2:

Hard crunchy shell, softened by
Time, ooh-eee-eee.
It used to be cheddar, but now it's turned into
Bleu cheese.

Soggy, brown lettuce, touching the
Floor ohh-iii-iii
Better make my move quick, so I don't have to share
With the mice.

Chorus 2:

So I ate it,
So I did it,
So I ate that
Taco.

Kinda funky,
Kinda spunky,
Didn't taste like a
Taco

Verse 3:

Listen real close, and you can
Hear. [grumbling noise]
The pain in my stomach brings me to
Tears. [grumbling noise]

I've made a mistake, this was an awful
Idea.
Now I'm just waiting, for the impending
Diarrhea.

Chorus 3:

Now I'm running
To the bathroom
To get out this
Taco.

I regret it,
Should've left it,
Should've thrown out that
Taco.

Verse 4:

Now I'm face down on the bathroom
Floor ehh-eee-eee
I need to eat something, something to settle
My belly.

That's when I notice, behind the
Toilet ohh-eee-eee
A half-eaten burger somebody left
Just for me.

Chorus 4:

Should I eat it?
Should I do it?
Should I eat that
Burger?

Should I eat it?
Should I do it?
Should I eat that
Burger?

Shouldn't eat it,
Shouldn't do it.
Shouldn't eat that
Burger.

Shouldn't eat it,
Shouldn't do it.
Shouldn't eat that
Taco.

The final song of the album is called "What Have You Learned?" It is a ballad of sorts that takes place during a job interview. The interviewer asks the protagonist what he has learned during his time in college. The interviewee then breaks into song and rattles off all the things he's learned in his four years. Some of the things learned were subjects like history and philosophy, and some were life skills like cooking and public speaking. I specifically included the lines about cooking to poke fun at the way job candidates exaggerate and stretch the truth in interviews. From the song "Leftovers," we already know that the singer of the songs obviously doesn't always take the time or effort to cook and will eat disgusting leftovers in order to avoid it. But the existence of the leftovers shows that at one point, he *did* actually cook something. In the end of the song, the interviewer says, "My only other question is, 'When can you start?'" I chose to end the song this way because I thought a positive ending to a college career would be

fitting for the end of the album. Getting a job is the main objective of college students, and I wanted the album to have a satisfying conclusion.

This song was interesting to write because it doesn't actually have a chorus. It's more in the form of a ballad, and the interviewee is listing all the things he learned to the interviewer. The most challenging part of this song, however, was the dialogue. I've never written a song that actually includes dialogue. Using different voices and embodying two different characters in this song was a fun experience. I enjoyed using two different voices and making one character's dialogue rhyme with the other's. I also had a good (albeit very difficult) time creating a rhyme about actuarial science that flows and actually makes sense. In the end, I'm very proud of this song, and the melody and some of the lyricism are my favorite of all three songs in this album.

What Have You Learned?

Intro: G C Em D

Verse: F F Am7 Em

(italics represent the interviewer's words)

Intro:

*So you went to Ball State, I can see it right here,
And you're really quite smart, I can see, it's quite clear.
So tell me before we conclude this interview,
What have you learned? Show me your point of view.*

Well I went for four years,
That's not what I'm looking for
I lived in the dorms.
Show yourself to the door.
Wait I can do it,
It won't take me long.

I'll say what I learned,
But I'll do it with song.

Verse:

I learned
History, philosophy, but that was introductory.
I learned that I'm a numbers guy, but that was no discovery.
How not to read the book assigned, but still to write the summary.
And how keep a smiling face on all through all the drudgery.

My first
Major's actuarial,
Sometimes it's dry material.
Sometimes you're in Excel, it's like
You're waiting for the burial.

But it can be rewarding,
I tell you this according
To my own experience,
When I'm calculating variance.

My second major's economics.
Revenues and costs and profits,
Private, public, club, and common
Goods for us to all examine.

Is that what you're looking for?
How 'bout some more specifics.
I can give you plenty, for this
Song's long and prolific.
And my minor is in business, but Accounting's masochistic,
And I think I'd rather stick to mathematics and statistics.

I've learned
How to live on my own,
How to be an adult,
How to cook for myself,
Dash of pepper, pinch of salt.

I learned how to work with people
On those gosh darn group projects.
I can give a presentation on a
Multitude of subjects.

So here is my resume,
And here's my list of references.
I hope you call me soon
And say that I'm who your first preference is.

*Well thanks for coming in,
One last thing as you depart.
My only other question is,
"When can you start?"*

Overall, I am satisfied with the way this project turned out. Initially, I was very ambitious, and when I thought of an album, I thought of an actual album that a band would create. Most albums consist of anywhere between six to fifteen songs. Somehow, I actually thought this would be manageable for me in one semester, even with other classes to work on. I quickly realized that I would need to settle for fewer songs. I decided to write three songs which would be of my very best work. I could have probably churned out another two songs for this album, but I feel that if I had, then the quality of them, as well as the three songs I actually wrote, would have suffered. Because I composed a smaller number of songs, I was able to really focus on them and put all my effort into them.

One thing that I would change about my project would be my singing. Even though I enjoy writing songs and playing them for an audience. I have never been much of a singer. I usually try to hide my voice behind the melody of the ukulele and try to make people laugh to distract from my less-than-beautiful singing voice. Since I recorded these songs and I'm proud of them, however, I decided to just do my best and own it. While they don't sound professional, I gave it my best effort, and the outcome is a product that I'm proud to put my name on. The actual recording of these songs, however, proved to be a challenge.

I do not own any high quality microphones or recording software. Initially, I used the built-in microphone on my laptop to record myself and captured it in a free music software. The quality resulting from this was horrendous. I then decided to plug in a pair of headphones that has a built in microphone and use that. This worked much better. I taped the microphone part of the headphones to the inside of the ukulele and recorded the ukulele portion of the song. Next, I listened to that portion of the song while singing to record the lyrics. Lastly, I recorded any additional percussion necessary for the song.

I very much enjoyed creating this project, and I hope my audience enjoys listening to it. I also hope that listeners can identify with some of the lyrics and understand that they're probably not the first to experience these emotions or situations. This has been a great experience for me and a great way to conclude my college experience.